

## FORGIVENESS AS A PREDICTOR OF DEPRESSION IN HIV+ ADULTS

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Depression affects diverse populations within the HIV+ community (Kalichman, 2000). This study examines the construct of forgiveness and its relationship to depression in people living with HIV/AIDS (PLH) as suggested by Snyder & Thompson (2000). Participants (n=153, 49.6% male, mean age=41.66, SD=8.39) self-identified as African-American (54.2%), Caucasian (29.5%), and Hispanic (11.1%). We assessed forgiveness with the Heartland Forgiveness Scale (HFS; Edwards, 2002), and depression with the Center for Epidemiological Studies-Depression (CES-D; Radloff, 1986). We specifically used the depressive affect subscale as recommended by Kalichman (2000) since it is appropriate to populations with chronic diseases.

The relationship between forgiveness and depression was explored in two exploratory hierarchical regression analyses. First, an exploratory hierarchical regression analysis examined whether the full forgiveness scale predicted depressive affect. A second regression included the three forgiveness subscales (Edwards, 2002) to better identify which aspects of forgiveness predict depressive affect.

The first analysis found our model explained 35% of the variance in depressive affect [adjusted  $R^2=.35$ ,  $F(15,137)=6.49$ ,  $p<.000$ ] and that as total forgiveness increased ( $t=-5.14$ ,  $p<.000$ ), participants reported less depressive affect. Our second analysis, which included the three forgiveness subscales, found our model explained more of the variance in depressive affect (42%; adjusted  $R^2=.42$ ,  $F(15,137)=8.30$ ,  $p<.000$ ). As forgiveness of self increased ( $t=-6.74$ ,  $p<.000$ ) participants reported less depressive affect. Neither the forgiveness of other nor situation subscales were significant predictors of depression in our model.

These findings suggest that forgiveness, particularly forgiveness of self, might be a useful topic to address when counseling depressed PLH. Forgiveness skills are teachable (Luskin, 2003) and if forgiveness is conceptualized as a coping mechanism, counselors potentially have another route to access and reduce depression in PLH. Future research is needed to provide a complete picture of the role that forgiveness of the situation and others has in influencing negative affect in PLH.